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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 002066

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN BRIAN RORAFF

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ON RESUMING PRISON VISITS

REF: TASHKENT 2018

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge d'Affaires met with ICRC Country Director Raffaello Muller and Head of the Regional Delegation in Central Asia Yves Giovannoni on December 3 to inquire about the status of negotiations with the GOU on resuming prison visits. ICRC remains "cautious" but noted that contact with the GOU has been more frequent and friendly as a direct result of the Ambassador raising the issue of ICRC prison access in his recent meeting with President Karimov (reftel). ICRC wants to ensure that its activities will be substantive and it "does not want to play games with the GOU," but hopes prison visits can begin sooner than expected. There are also legal issues to be worked out regarding access to death row inmates whose sentences are being commuted. ICRC noted its interest in establishing related projects such as addressing tuberculosis in correctional systems, but it could take one or two years to put the resources in place before implementing such a project if the GOU changes its mindset on acknowledging the existence of such problems and permits ICRC activity in this area. End summary.

Red Carpet for the Red Cross

¶2. (C) Charge met with ICRC representatives Giovannoni and Muller on December 3 to inquire about new developments in its negotiations with the GOU over prison visits. ICRC noted a definite change in the GOU's stance since the Ambassador personally raised the prison visit access issue during his recent meetings with President Karimov and other high-ranking officials. ICRC has had more recent access and dialogue with GOU officials, including a December 3 meeting with the Vice Minister of Internal Affairs responsible for penitentiary services. The tone of the meetings has recently become very friendly, and Giovannoni underscored that ICRC is very appreciative of USG assistance and the Ambassador's personal interest and involvement on this issue. ICRC is cautiously optimistic that prison visits could resume sooner than expected, if the pace of progress continues.

"Where is the Substance?"

¶3. (C) Giovannoni stated that there is no need to discuss modalities with the GOU, as they are clearly spelled out in the existing agreement that has been in place for many years. ICRC does not want its staff to spend too much of their time "fighting over modalities" at the expense of accomplishing their core mission. Despite the friendly tone and stated offers to restart prison visits immediately, ICRC wants to ensure that its activities will be substantive and that its findings will be seriously reviewed at the highest appropriate levels within the GOU. For instance, they cited prison-level problems such as dilapidated infrastructure that previously recurred at facilities throughout the country but were never addressed. They pointed out the ICRC mission is of limited value if no recommended changes are actually implemented.

Beware of the Spin

¶4. (C) Muller noted that the GOU may attempt to use ICRC prison visits as a public relations tool without intending to take its recommendations seriously, and he added the ICRC "does not want to play a game with the GOU." He added that this is why the ICRC is not immediately restarting prison visits despite the GOU's recent emphatic statements that access is "no problem" and visits can restart at any time.

More Lifers

¶5. (C) Muller also discussed the legal problem posed by the

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imminent abolition (on January 1, 2008) of the death penalty in Uzbekistan, which will result in the commutation of existing death sentences and an increase in the census of prisoners serving life sentences. ICRC was not previously given access to death row inmates and new terms of access to these prisoners will have to be negotiated. The GOU is also constructing a new prison in a very remote area of Karakalpakstan Province of western Uzbekistan to accommodate the increased number of inmates with long or life sentences, and ICRC is keen on obtaining access to this new facility.

Tuberculosis

¶6. (C) In addition to prison visits, ICRC is interested in expanding projects to address rampant tuberculosis in the correctional system. However, Muller commented that "first the GOU needs to stop lying to itself" and denying to its own officials that the problem exists on a large scale. He also described the limited regional scope of existing or previous efforts to halt tuberculosis as ineffective since "TB recognizes no boundaries." Even if agreements are reached with the GOU in the near future, Giovannoni noted it would require an additional one or two years before ICRC can mobilize resources to implement a sufficiently large-scale project.

Comment

¶7. (C/NF) It was clear from this conversation that an invitation from the GOU alone is insufficient as a basis to restart prison visits, and that ICRC will patiently wait until it is confident its operations will be substantive enough to meet its organizational mission. The Ambassador's intervention with President Karimov is clearly having an impact in terms of improved ICRC access to GOU officials and the latter's readiness to more substantially engage. We now must wait to see the results.

HANSON